

TRAVELER'S ASSISTANCE

by
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FADE IN:

EXT. TRUCK STOP - LATE NIGHT

Foggy, desolate, dark. Truck pulls in from freeway.

INT. TRUCK CAB

KENNETH steers his rig among rows of parked eighteen-wheelers. A small dashboard photo of a little girl is the cab's only decoration.

Truck's headlights cut across a thin teenager, TYLER, stepping down from the passenger side of a semi.

INT. TRUCK STOP BUILDING - MINI MART

Soulful country music plays. BRANDY, 20's, works the counter under a "Traveler's Assistance" sign. She wears a rhinestone barrette and flips through a stack of postcards.

LONG-HAULER places a can of Red Bull and a packet of Twizzlers on the counter, quietly singing along with the music.

BRANDY
Need a little juice, huh?

LONG-HAULER
Making up time tonight.

BRANDY
(motions at a stack of
discount cassette tapes)
How about some new tunes?

LONG-HAULER
Nah, don't think so.

Long-Hauler checks out the assortment nonetheless.

Tyler enters and Brandy eyes the newcomer. He looks no more than 14 -- with greasy hair, a scabbed face and a desperate look. He wears an old jeans jacket.

Long-Hauler pulls out a cassette, hands it to Brandy.

BRANDY
Always a jewel in the junk.

LONG-HAULER
Guess so. Take it easy.

BRANDY
Keep 'em between the ditches now.

LONG-HAULER
(amused, exits)
10-4.

Tyler slips a candy bar into his jacket pocket. Brandy SLAPS her hand down on the counter. Tyler looks up and Brandy tips her head towards the security camera.

Tyler returns the candy. Brandy pulls out a sandwich.

BRANDY
Looks like I get the idiot prize.
Here I make myself a sandwich and
then splurge on nuggets. Take it.
It'll spoil.

Tyler approaches cautiously.

TYLER
You sure?

Brandy pushes the sandwich across the counter.

BRANDY
You want to use the phone? Maybe
give someone a call?

TYLER
(shakes his head)
I'm good.

BRANDY
Be careful out there, huh? This is
no place to hang around.

Tyler backs out the door, holds up the sandwich.

TYLER
I'm good. And thanks for this.

INT. KENNETH'S TRUCK CAB

Kenneth stuffs an empty Fritos bag into a coffee cup.

INT. TRUCK STOP BUILDING - MINI MART

Brandy sifts through her postcards: Phoenix, Miami Beach, Seattle, the Twin Cities.

INT. TRUCK STOP BUILDING - LOBBY

Brandy steps into a lobby forming a hub for a television room, rest rooms, showers and restaurant. She studies a wall monitor scrolling destinations and freight information. A nearby bulletin board is filled with trucks for sale signs, FBI Wanted posters and a Truckers for Christ flyer.

Kenneth studies an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting notice. Brandy gives him a once-over and brightens: he's neat and trim; his shirt is tucked in.

BRANDY
Evening, mister.

KENNETH
Ma'am.

Kenneth heads to the men's room as Brandy tacks up a flyer with a photo of a kitten and the words "Help Me!" on it.

BRANDY
Let me know if you need anything.
I'm here all night.

KENNETH
Will do.

INT. TRUCK STOP BUILDING - MEN'S REST ROOM - AT THE SINK

Kenneth splashes water on his face and looks in the mirror. Weariness reflects back -- from the road, from life. After a moment he squares his shoulder and heads out.

EXT. TRUCK STOP - PATCH OF GRASS - BESIDE A FENCE

Tyler takes a seat beside a chain link fence and inhales the sandwich. The RUSH of the interstate is louder here.

He reaches for a knapsack stashed in nearby brush, takes out two sweatshirts. Puts one over his jacket, one around his shoes. Pulls out a joint and fires it up.

I/E. KENNETH'S TRUCK CAB (PARKED)

Kenneth opens the door to his cab. A LADY OF THE NIGHT emerges from the darkness and taps him on the shoulder. Kenneth shakes his head.

He climbs into his cab and ponders the smiling face of the girl in the dashboard photo. She's about 5.

Moves back into his sleeping area and neatly stows his shoes. Takes a seat on the cot, elbows on knees, face in hands.

INT. TRUCK CAB (MOVING)

Long-Hauler makes up time. He's got a Twizzler in his mouth, a new cassette in his tape deck and a long mostly deserted road ahead. Every now and then, colorful lights flicker in the moonlight.

EXT. INTERSTATE - TRUCK WHEELBASE (MOVING)

Spinning tires in the night.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. TRUCK STOP - MORNING

Crowded and buzzing with activity. Truckers fuel up, motorists wash windows. A car HONKS.

INT. TRUCK STOP BUILDING - MINI MART

Place is hopping. Brandy rings up an order of donuts while she works the microphone.

BRANDY

(into microphone)

For those heading east, looks like lady luck is on your side. Straight shot out there -- no rain, wrecks or flag wavers. Things look pretty good for our westbounders, too. Only hold-up is a right lane closure between exits 74 and 75. Diesel prices dropped eleven cents overnight. What a deal, huh?

(MORE)

BRANDY (cont'd)
 And we now offer a new gourmet
 coffee flavor -- mint mocha.
 (one of a bank of lights
 flashes behind the
 counter)
 Big Red, your shower is ready.
 Come see me for your card key.

Kenneth approaches, puts a five dollar bill on the counter.

KENNETH
 Still here?

BRANDY
 Until 10. Six days a week.

KENNETH
 Long wait for a shower?

BRANDY
 Just be a few minutes. What's your
 name, anyway?

KENNETH
 Kenneth.

BRANDY
 Okay, Kenneth. Standby. I'll call
 you when it's ready.

EXT. TRUCK STOP - MOTORIST PARKING AREA

Tyler, knapsack over his shoulder, idles up to a MAN and
 WOMAN getting into a station wagon.

TYLER
 Got room for one more? I can
 hunker down in the back.

They shake their heads, avert their eyes, get in their car.
 Tyler turns his head, fights back tears.

INT. TRUCK STOP BUILDING - MINI MART

Brandy hits the microphone again.

BRANDY
 (into microphone)
 I'm also pleased to tell you we've
 gone hi-tech.
 (MORE)

BRANDY (cont'd)
 You have a WiFi question, just ask
 one of our laptop truckers. They
 hang out in the TV room.

INT. TRUCK STOP BUILDING - TELEVISION ROOM

LAPTOP TRUCKER, with tattooed forearms, stops clicking away
 on his laptop long enough to grin up at the loudspeaker.

BRANDY (V.O.)
 And I have a 10-29 for Big Red.
 Your rain locker is ready. Can't
 hold it all day.

INT. TRUCK STOP BUILDING - MINI MART

Another light flashes. Brandy hands a card key to Kenneth,
 who nods in appreciation.

BRANDY
 Number six.

Brandy glances out the window. A man wearing a John Deere
 cap, TRACTOR MAN, slaps a five dollar bill on the counter.

TRACTOR MAN
 You got one more a those, honey?

BRANDY
 Hold on a sec.
 (into microphone)
 Last call, Big Red. Going once,
 going twice, three times...Big Red,
 your shower is sold to the man in
 the John Deere cap.
 (hands key to Tractor Man)
 I need a favor first. Folks on
 eleven need a hand.

Tractor Man casts a dubious look outside, where an elderly
 HUSBAND and WIFE try to work the automated pump machine.

TRACTOR MAN
 This for real? I'm on the clock
 here, sugar.

BRANDY
 So take a shorter shower.

Tractor Man shakes his head but moves towards the door.

INT. TRUCK STOP BUILDING - SHOWER STALL

Steaming water pours down over Kenneth. He wears a small gold chain and crucifix around his neck.

INT. TRUCK STOP BUILDING - RESTAURANT

Brandy takes a corner booth by the kitchen. Gazes out the window and sees Laptop Trucker toss something in a trash can. Tyler goes in after it.

A WAITRESS comes by with a cup of tea.

WAITRESS
Cinnamon rolls are hot. Want one?

BRANDY
Last thing I need. How'd it go last night?

WAITRESS
He showed up.

BRANDY
That's a good sign.

WAITRESS
(rolls eyes)
Yeah, well, I'm not holding my breath.

BRANDY
Always a jewel in the junk.

WAITRESS
Sure.

Brandy opens her purse, takes out the postcards. Her rhinestone barrette sparkles. Kenneth passes by.

BRANDY
Hey there, trucker. Have a seat.

KENNETH
(obliges, points to postcards)
Looks like you have quite a collection.

BRANDY

I always tell them -- send me a postcard from your drop stop. And a few do. Here's Seattle. See? And Phoenix and Houston. They call Houston the Dome, but you know that.

KENNETH

Mhm.

BRANDY

The guy who sent it, he had a real nice ride. Freightliner Coronado with a raised roof. And this one here, from Bean Town? Western Star Stratosphere. Canary yellow with a double lightning bolt on the side.

KENNETH

Sounds fancy.

Brandy locates a particular postcard.

BRANDY

A lady trucker sent this one from Guitar Town. She used to be a bank teller. Now she drives for Rite Aid. What's your rig?

KENNETH

Just an old Bulldog.

BRANDY

I've heard good things about them.
 (searches out the window)
 One of these days, my rig's going to slide on out of here. One of these days for sure.
 (focuses on Tyler)
 That kid there, he needs help. He needs a ride.

Kenneth shifts to consider the scruffy teen.

KENNETH

I'd think twice before I picked him up.

BRANDY

Oh yeah? Some people might think
twice before they picked you up.
You go by anything besides Kenneth?

KENNETH

Handle's Ajax. But Kenny's what I
prefer.

BRANDY

I'm Brandy.
(thoughtful look on her
face)
That kid really needs help.

INT. KENNETH'S TRUCK CAB

Kenneth and Tyler settle in.

TYLER

I sure appreciate this. I been
here three days now. Freaky scene
at night. And cold. Man it was
cold last night.
(motions to photo)
That your daughter?

KENNETH

Sure is.

TYLER

Cute. Where she live?

KENNETH

Pretty far away. I don't get to
see her much.

Now it's Tyler's turn to consider the harrowed if tidy
trucker.

TYLER

Day at a time, man.

KENNETH

Yeah.
(starts engine)
Day at a time.

TYLER

So where we headed?

KENNETH

Well, I'm headed to Kansas City.
 (looks at the photo and
 back at the truck stop)
 We truckers call KC Bright Lights.
 (smiles)
 And I don't know where you're
 headed, my friend. But we can talk
 about it if you want. Maybe figure
 some stuff out.

INT. TRUCK STOP BUILDING - MINI MART

Brandy stands behind the counter facing the window, her
 attention focused on the trucks outside.

BRANDY

(into microphone)
 One more thing, folks. Some creep
 left a kitten out back and he's
 looking for a home. His picture's
 on the board. He'll make a good
 traveling companion for sure.

An old Bulldog drives past and TOOTS its horn. Brandy sees
 Kenneth and his passenger. Nods, smiles, turns away from the
 window.

EXT. TRUCK STOP/INTERSTATE

Camera pans over the entire complex, lingers on a long shot
 of the seemingly infinite interstate.

Kenneth's truck disappears into the horizon.

BRANDY (V.O)

Drive safe now and keep the black
 stacks smokin'. Eighty-eights
 around the house and I'll catch ya
 on the flip-flop...If I don't see
 you in the hammer lane first.

FADE TO BLACK.